



If the past several months have taught us anything, it's the importance of adaptability. The spring and summer of 2020 posed enormous challenges. Rapidly shifting our teaching and administration from in-person to remote. Preparing for a serious budget reduction. And creating a fall term that would provide our students with the best and safest educational experience possible during a global pandemic.

Dealing with any one of these issues would have been a heavy lift for our

faculty and staff who were already working at full capacity. But managing all of them simultaneously required a Herculean effort. Yet this is what you've accomplished. And you've done it while quarantined; while sharing home offices with significant others and roommates who were also working remotely; while supervising and educating children in what has become the longest 'take your child to work day' in history; while learning new ways and adopting new tools for doing your jobs; and while we all had to contend with fears, concerns, and anxieties about a time of overwhelming uncertainty.

There is still plenty of uncertainty. But we are moving forward. And we're able to do that because of the hard work, boundless energy, and extraordinary good will that all of you have brought to this endeavor. Over the past few weeks, I've heard incredible stories about the sacrifices you've made and the ingenuity, patience, and kindness you've shown during this difficult time. You've inspired me, and I'm grateful.

In this issue of the Dietrich School Bulletin, we're focusing on stories of adaptability. Notes from the field, if you will, that highlight some of the many ways our departments and units went—and continue to go—the extra mile to provide extraordinary service. While these stories are representative, they are certainly not all encompassing. Think of them as a few of the shining stars in a night sky—bright points of light to help guide us as we continue onward.

On a final note, I would be remiss if I didn't take the time to acknowledge those colleagues among us who will be retiring as part of the University's early-retirement packages for staff and faculty. You will be invited to celebrate the contributions of these long-time collaborators during a virtual happy hour in October, but until then, please join me in recognizing the following people who are about to set off on an exciting new journey of their own:

Staff Retirees: (as of September 1)

Cynthia Albert; Barbara Anderson; Michael Barrett; Lynn Berezna; Christine Berliner; Eleanor Caligiuri; Deborah Connell; Phyllis Deasy; Barbara Delraso; David Demilio; Laura Dice; Beth Dummer; Patti Freker; Tom Gasmire; Veronica Gazdik; Kathy Gibson; Mary Hamler; Stephanie Hanville; Thomas Harper; Maureen Henderson; Linda Hicks; Leyla Hirschfeld; Judith Hreha; Debra Hunt; Karen

Ianni; Patty Landon; Lynn Lantz; Paula Locante; Regina Mahouski; Nancy Matrozza; Babs Mowery; Lori Neu; Erie Pierre; Paula Riemer; Maggie Schneider; Jeff Sicher; Georgia Spears; James Stango; Grace Tomcho; Barbara Vattimo; Debra Ziolkowski.

Faculty Retirees: (as of September 1)

Jonathan Arac; Don Bialostosky; Jean Carr; Rebecca Denova; Minglu Gao; John Gareis; Karen Gerhart; Paula Grabowski; Lewis Jacobson; Nicholas Jones; John Lyne; Michael Morrill; Clark Muenzer; Kathleen Musante; Tony Novosel; Craig Peebles; Daniel Romesberg; John Rosenberg; Cynthia Skrzycki; Edward Stricker; Cecile Chu-Chin Sun.

TRIO SSS Program Virtual Retreat

For the first time last year, Michele Lagnese, director of the TRIO SSS program, and her staff hosted a four-day retreat for all new SSS students. The role of the program is to help first-generation and low-income students to make the most of their time at Pitt. SSS offers advising, skills-building workshops, leadership training, and academic tutoring as well as lots of fun social outings and activities. Michele said the retreat was an incredible bonding experience, and she was eager to repeat that success this year. And not even the pandemic could stop the SSS team.

"Last year we took them places—we went to dinner at Station Square, they learned how to navigate the bus system by riding the buses. We have a staff of six and all of us feel very strongly about each person having a relationship with our students," Michele offers. "We were worried about losing that opportunity to build community, which is one of our pillars."

Ultimately, it was the motivation and commitment of the staff that enabled SSS to pivot and make the retreat meaningful for students in a whole new way. "We involved everyone. Our Peer Mentors hosted a meal on Zoom where everyone brought their food and ate together. Sheba Gittens did a yoga session. James Scott reached out to some young alumnae of the program and invited them to be part of a Q & A session on how they'd used their time at Pitt to prepare them for their careers. It was incredibly impactful."

While Michele and her staff are hopeful that next year's event will happen in person, they're also committed to taking advantage of the benefits gained through use of technology.

"We're all wanting things to get back to the way they were, but this also introduced new options and opportunities. It was very special to be able to feature these two young women who wouldn't have been able to travel in for the retreat even if it hadn't been during the pandemic. We'll incorporate that next time for sure. Throughout the planning process, the staff kept saying, 'Let's take this and make it awesome.' I really believe we succeeded."

DEI Modified Training

Director of Workforce Effectiveness Maureen Lazar has been conducting the popular four-day Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Training (formerly the Anti-Defamation League Campus of Difference Training) since May 2019, and during that time more than 70 Dietrich School faculty and staff members have completed the intensive program. When the Dietrich School moved to remote operations in mid-March, Maureen was in the process of completing one training and had another already scheduled for August. Though she originally considered postponing the August session until everyone was back on campus, she realized in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder and the need for the School to develop new ways to respond with compassion and action to our nation's reckoning with systemic anti-Black racism that the training was more relevant and necessary than ever. So she set about adapting the 12-hour training to a Zoom-friendly structure.

Ultimately, Maureen was able to reduce the training to eight hours over four days, with participants logging in for two hours each day. Says Maureen, "The core content is maintained and allows for lively discussion in small groups with a cohort of up to 25 participants." The August class included 22 faculty and staff members and their feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Positive enough, in fact, that Maureen is planning to offer two additional opportunities in mid-October and mid-December for people to complete the training on Zoom. Visit <https://www.as.pitt.edu/diversity/deittraining> for details.

Staff Volunteer Team

Linda Howard, division administrator for the social sciences, coordinated a 'Tiger Team' of staff members from her area, individuals who volunteer their time when the Dean's Office put out the call that there was a growing list of tasks—some pandemic-related and some not—in need of additional support.

The team, which included, Beth Cahill, Meg Caruso, Brian Deutsch, Kathy Gibson, Cindy Graf, Sloane Kozyak, Wynn Maloney, Shannon Mischler, Georgia Spears, and Kimberly Thomas, put their energy to work on a wide range of projects, including Web site updates, transcribing video scripts, phone-a-thon campaigns reaching out to graduating seniors as well as admitted first-year students, a number of Qualtrics initiatives, benchmarking activities, and several other assignments.

Linda estimates that the group accumulated dozens of hours of volunteer work, above and beyond their regular jobs. Some of the tasks required additional training outside the scope of the staffers' regular responsibilities, which Linda regarded as an added bonus. "We're in an educational institution—we should be learning. These projects have given people more opportunity to learn about the University and what happens in units outside of their own." Added Linda, "One of the things I try to do when I hire staff is find people who are on a career journey. They want to learn new skills and gain new competencies and I see it as my role to help them do that so they can get to the next chapter. All of these people were eager and interested in contributing. They wanted to keep busy. None of them wanted to have any down time, even working remotely."

Providing A Different Kind of Teaching Lab

For natural sciences departments, one of the most significant challenges of moving to remote teaching was managing laboratory courses so that they could be delivered online. While some peer institutions opted to use 'off the shelf' prepackaged modules, our faculty members felt very strongly that, in the words of Jeffrey

Lawrence, chair of our Department of Biological Sciences, "...our course offerings need to be rooted in a foundation of real, ongoing research projects where the students' analyses have real impact on research and are used for publications."

To that end, during the spring and in preparation for their summer and fall courses, faculty members from natural sciences departments submitted proposals requesting access to campus so they could run labs. The proposals provided detailed breakdowns of how the faculty could work within campus safety protocols without compromising the quality of their students' experiences.

For Kim Payne that meant being on campus for four days in May so that she could prepare and film experiments for her Introduction to Microbiology Lab course. For Jeffrey Hildebrand, it meant having access to his lab twice weekly throughout the summer to set up crosses of the fruit fly *Drosophila* for his Cell Biology and Foundation of Biology labs.

In the Department of Chemistry, a team of five faculty and staff members, recorded 22 labs and pre-lab talks over the course of 71 hours during a three-week period. That's on top of all of the other changes that had to occur in order to present cohesive laboratory experiences, such as substituting Canvas and Top Hat quizzes for standard in-classroom post-lab lecture quizzes, and asking students to submit images of their lab notebooks so they could be graded.

This kind of extra effort ensured that our students weren't missing out or falling behind with this critical course work, much of it constituting the foundation of more complex concepts and subject matter to come.

Starting with the Students

Gayle Rogers, chair of the Department of English, credits his department's classroom instructors for the swift and thoughtful way his team was able to shift to remote learning. "It was the people who work with students every day. They were thinking about this even before Pitt announced that we were going remote. Our four directors of undergraduate studies—Marylou Gramm, Amy Murray Twynning, Jeff Oaks, and Dana Och—and our office staff were remarkable, providing support and infrastructure, even from a distance."

That student-driven approach meant reaching out to students, checking in to see how they were what their needs were, what common challenges were emerging. Faculty members looked at their syllabi for the second half of the spring term and asked students, Do you have the books you need or are they in your dorm room? Do you have access to technology and a safe, private space to work? Have you lost a job or become a caregiver? The responses to these questions helped the department to craft a compassionate, holistic response.

"At first, the goal was setting a bar of shared expectations and finding a way to make it through the spring semester together," Gayle remembers. "We tried to control what we could control, operating within what we know how to do well, and learning from our students all along."

For the second phase, the four directors created guides and built a network of shared resources for all faculty to use, including primers for Canvas, Zoom, Panopto, and remote teaching in general. "Our

faculty brought a lot of expertise to the table, but no one had taught in quite this environment before. This involved retraining, learning, and adapting, in some cases despite a lot of uncertainty with their personal situations as they awaited contracts for the fall. But they came through, and thus far are delivering outstanding results.”

A Quality of Life Issue

Colleagues in the Department of Music had to identify and, in many cases create, ways for their students to not only safely share space for classroom instruction, but for rehearsing and performing as well. Department chair Mathew Rosenblum regarded this challenge as not only an educational imperative, but something much bigger. “In these challenging times, we believe it’s important for students to continue to have creative outlets for their emotional well-being and quality of life and continued academic growth.”

So what does that look like? The department’s 11 ensembles will rehearse in person in small cohorts by meeting in the Cathedral Lawn Tent and the basement of the University Club, spaces are large enough and well enough ventilated to allow social distancing. For the world music ensembles, which require specialized instruments, the department invested in additional instruments like African drums and Indonesian flutes so students don’t have to share.

To make remote learning more viable and less fatiguing, the department purchased additional usb microphones and keyboards for students and faculty. Affordable usb microphones improve audio quality significantly, which was important for both professors giving online lectures, and ensemble members recording their parts for a virtual performance.

Just before quarantine, the department had nearly completed the installation of a state-of-the-art live mixing and recording suite in Bellefield Hall Auditorium. The installation, which will be finalized in September, expands the department’s capacity to include live, multi-camera video for live-streaming. The enhanced Bellefield Auditorium installation will also allow for the presentation of solo and small, socially distanced ensembles live-streamed via digital platforms until they can once again host in-person concerts.

While the pandemic necessitated many changes from the Department of Music, one thing has marched on, happily undeterred: the Music at Pitt Podcast has continued throughout quarantine by recording interviews over Zoom. The MAP provides in depth conversations with the department’s students, faculty, and alumni and represents the breadth of the unit’s scholarly and creative work in an informal and engaging way. Find out more at <https://www.music.pitt.edu/podcast>

Building a Bridge

In the midst of an already difficult situation, the College of General Studies faced an additional hurdle—many of their instructors were part time, otherwise unaffiliated with a Pitt or Dietrich School department, and in some cases, only teaching one course. This often meant they were not plugged in to the University’s extensive library of resources, and needed extra help connecting to the tools they needed.

Says CGS’s Boryana Dobрева, Director of Academic Programs, “Over the past few months, our focus has been on expanding the suite of instructional and online course design resources for instructors

teaching for CGS.” To accomplish this Boryana partnered with the Center for Teaching and Learning and other collaborators to develop and deliver a suite of videos, templates, and more. She posted many of these resources to the College’s faculty Web page (<https://www.cgs.pitt.edu/faculty-resources-and-forms>) and in one case, even created an incentive for instructors willing to expand their skill set.

“We launched the CGS Canvas Faculty Online demo course, developed in partnership with CTL and designed specifically for CGS course developers who are in the process of converting their face-to-face course into an online format or are working on the revisions of an existing online class. Instructors are introduced to established best practices and CGS-accepted standards for online course planning, design, and implementation through modeling (watch, practice, and be inspired). Upon completion of the demo course and associated milestones, CGS instructors can request from CGS a Certificate of Completion for their teaching portfolio and resume.”

There are currently over 100 users enrolled in the demo, which also allows instructors to request one-on-one consultations with an instructional designer/teaching and learning consultant, complete various self-checks to self-assess their courses, and receive complimentary feedback from CGS and an instructional designer on their course syllabi.

The opportunity for just-in-time feedback is central to services that the CGS Academic Programs unit is providing for CGS instructors—daily virtual drop-in consultations for faculty and on-demand assistance with the actual transitioning of the classes into Canvas.

Bringing People Together

Diego Holstein wasn’t scheduled to become chair of the Department of History until September 1. But as a result of the pandemic, Diego stepped into a crucial leadership role earlier than anticipated, heading up the department’s efforts to transition from in-person to remote teaching. “I’d already given a lot of thought about what I wanted to accomplish during my time as chair,” Diego explains. “Our department has a wide range of faculty members resulting from a decade long process of turnover—some early in their careers, who had more or less recently joined, some senior with highly variable lengths of membership in the department. I’d been interested in finding more ways to bring us together—to identify a collective project or a common challenge we could address as a group. Unintendedly, this emergency ended up being the thing that further galvanized us as a team.”

Diego credits the support of long-time chair Lara Putnam, the extraordinary efforts of Liann Tsoukas, history’s Director of Undergraduate Studies, and the commitment, dedication, and skills of the history faculty with the success of the department’s efforts. “We came into this from a strong position,” says Diego. “That was crucial.”

The first step was helping faculty members master the new tools, including Canvas, Zoom, and Panopto. “We were the content experts, but we had to change the modes of delivery,” says Diego. To achieve that level of mastery, the department worked closely with partners in the Center for Teaching and Learning. By June, the group was fluent

with the nuts and bolts, and it was time to turn their collective attention to the pedagogy.

Liann coordinated the effort to invite, collect, and share information, including a Crowd Sourced Web page that quickly populated with colleagues' contributions. "We started meeting early in May and got together in large and small groups all summer," Liann says. "We went to our teaching assistants and grad students. We used the feedback the University provided from undergraduate focus groups, as well as that from our own OMETS. We gathered emails we'd received from our students after the spring term—listened to what worked for them and considered what their needs were in this new environment. We asked faculty to tell us which strategies and assignments were effective, and which weren't."

"We wanted to ensure that we were delivering classes that were personally and intellectually meaningful to our students," says Liann.

The process became an opportunity to recognize peoples' strengths and talents, and to reveal vulnerabilities and insecurities. Which, ultimately, made them all closer.

Says Diego, "We worked together, and we got to know each other differently. You see each other's lives and families when you're meeting all the time and we have a renewed sense of community. By witnessing the genuine, across the board sense of commitment and dedication and professionalism we've really all brought out the best in each other. At the end of every meeting, we'd all look at each other and say, 'We will do this.' And we did."